

Echo

Last talks to avoid evicting travellers

9:00am Wednesday 26th January 2011

By Jon Austin

Talks are to be held between Basildon Council and travellers living on an illegal camp to avoid the £13million cost of an eviction.

Basildon and Billericay MP John Baron has arranged the talks in the House of Commons on Thursday, between council officials and those representing some 90 families living on the Dale Farm site in Crays Hill.

The eviction is expected this spring if the families do not leave about 50 unauthorised caravan pitches. Council leader Tony Ball will be at the meeting along with Dawn French, the council's head of planning.

Mr Ball said: "What I hope to achieve is to try to encourage the families to move off peacefully so we can avoid the cost of an eviction. In doing this we will stress that if families do not move

off by choice then direct action will go ahead.”

The council and Mr Baron want the travellers to move outside the district, but so far no suitable locations have been identified and there is still nothing on the table.

The Government suggested the use of a camp at Avondale in Bristol, which has been empty for years despite it costing taxpayers £425,000 to build.

However, it was ruled out after it emerged it is a temporary site with a maximum stay of two weeks and occupants have to prove they have elsewhere to move to.

The traveller delegation on Thursday includes campaigner Grattan Puxon, Liberal democrat peer Lord Avebury, Dale Farm spokesman Richard Sheridan, and Father Dan Mason, Catholic Priest of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, Wickford.

Mr Puxon said: “We will be putting forward alternative sites in the district on land identified by the Homes and Communities Agency.

“If the council supports this there would be no need for eviction.”

Mr Ball said the council had made its position clear it wants other authorities to make provision, but said it will consider any suggestions.

THE Government has still not said if it will provide millions of pounds needed for the eviction.

Essex Police says it could cost the force up to £10million if

protesters dig in at the site and has applied to the Home Office for the money.

Basildon Council has £1.9million set aside, but could need a further million and has applied to the Department for Communities and Government.

A decision is expected soon, but there has been no announcement.

The Echo understands the council will table a special meeting to rubberstamp using the money once the decision is made.

If the Government says no then it will look at other ways of funding the eviction, which may include borrowing.

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